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Follow-up actions to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

Letter dated 6 May 2004 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am enclosing the United States explanation of its position on the draft resolution entitled "Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" (E/CN.9/2004/L.6), which was adopted by the Commission on Population and Development on 6 May 2004 (see annex). In our intervention at the plenary under the relevant agenda item, entitled "Adoption of the report of the Commission on its thirty-seventh session", we requested that the attached explanation be circulated as a document of the thirty-seventh session of the Commission and included in its report. We understand that the Secretariat will include a summary of the explanation in the report of the session.

(*Signed*) James B. **Cunningham**
Ambassador
Deputy Permanent Representative

04-38009 (E) 140604

Annex to the letter dated 6 May 2004 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by Madelyn Spirnak, Deputy United States Representative on the Economic and Social Council, in explanation of the position of the United States of America on the resolution entitled "Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development", made to the Commission on Population and Development on 6 May 2004

While the United States has joined the consensus on the resolution entitled "Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development", the United States Government wishes to make the following explanation of its position.

There is much in the Programme of Action that the United States supports. This support is not just theoretical; the United States is a leader in providing assistance to achieve many of the objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development. In fiscal year 2003, the United States Government provided about $1.82 billion for health programmes; besides family planning and reproductive health, most of this went to HIV/AIDS, child survival and maternal health and HIV/AIDS. Through the United States Agency for International Development, the United States also provided nearly $474 million for education and training programmes in developing countries, mostly for children's basic education and literacy. As you know, President Bush's emergency plan for AIDS relief is being implemented. That plan will provide $15 billion over five years to expand prevention and treatment programmes. Of this, $9 billion will be new money. In addition, $25 million will be programmed in fiscal year 2004 to help victims of trafficking. Funding for family planning and reproductive health has amounted to between $424 million and $446 million over the last four years, a substantial increase over the four preceding years. These and other programmes demonstrate the United States Government's clear commitment to many of the objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development.

The United States wishes to associate itself with the numerous delegations that made reservations or statements of interpretation at the International Conference on Population and Development and other major United Nations conferences as regards the terms "reproductive rights", "reproductive health", "reproductive health care and services", "family-planning services" and "sexual health". The United States understands that the word "reaffirming" in reference to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the words "key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" or any other reference to United Nations conference documents does not constitute a reaffirmation of any language in those documents that could be interpreted as promoting abortion or the use of abortifacients. The United States does, however, support the treatment of women who suffer injuries or illnesses caused by legal or illegal abortion, including, for example, post-abortion care, and does not place such treatment among abortion-related services.

The United States further understands that any affirmation or reaffirmation of the International Conference on Population and Development, its five-year review or other United Nations conference documents does not imply any support for or promotion of abortion, nor is it a denial of the firm support of the United States for the rights of conscientious objection for health-care workers whose personal beliefs might dictate their refusal to perform or be involved in abortion or abortion-related activities.

The United States further understands that the term "unsafe abortion" defines a procedure for terminating a pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking minimal medical standards or both, and understands that the illegality of abortion cannot be construed as making it unsafe.

The United States fully supports the principle of voluntary choice in family planning. It strongly reiterates that in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning, and that women who have recourse to abortion should in all cases have humane treatment and counselling provided to them. Couples should be able to choose which family planning method to use and whether to use any method at all. In order to ensure that such choices are truly voluntary, couples should be fully informed of the mechanisms, risks and benefits of the full range of contraceptive methods prior to making choices regarding family planning methods.

The United States regards abstinence as the preferred, most responsible and healthiest choice for unmarried adolescents. With regard to "reproductive rights" in the context of children or adolescents, the United States further understands any such rights to be linked to the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents, who have primary responsibility for their children's education and well-being. In this regard, the United States emphasizes the importance it attaches to the involvement of parents in decisions affecting children and adolescents in all aspects of sexual and reproductive health.

The United States further understands that any promotion of correct and consistent use of condoms or other methods of family planning for adolescents in this or other United Nations or United Nations conference documents should be interpreted in the context of its continued support for and promotion of abstinence.

Finally, the United States requests the secretariat of the Commission on Population and Development to include a summary of this explanation of position and a clear reference to it in the official record of this meeting, and to circulate the explanation of position as a document of the thirty-seventh session of the Commission.